

NCA
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CHARLES MEDD

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THE REPUBLICANS AND THE BALD EAGLE

ANNCR:

REPUBLICAN STATE GOVERNORS WERE IN WASHINGTON EARLY THIS WEEK TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF THEIR PARTY IN THE WAKE OF THE RECENT ELECTION SET-BACKS. CHARLES MEDD LOOKS AT THE MUCH-TRoubLED REPUBLICANS.

VOICE:

LIKE THE BALD EAGLE, AMERICA'S NATIONAL SYMBOL, THE REPUBLICAN PARTY HAS A PROUD HERITAGE BUT AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE. WHETHER THE GIANT BIRD IS NEADED FOR EXTINCTION DEPENDS IN LARGE PART ON THE EFFORTS OF CONCERNED CONSERVATIONISTS. WHETHER THE REPUBLICANS CAN SURVIVE AS A VIABLE POLITICAL FORCE WILL DEPEND PRETTY MUCH ON THEMSELVES.

PARTY SURVIVAL WAS THE CENTRAL THEME OF THIS WEEK'S CONFERENCE OF REPUBLICAN GOVERNORS WHOSE THIN RANKS, NOW DOWN TO AN EVEN DOZEN, REFLECT THE LATEST CASUALTY FIGURES. THE NOVEMBER ELECTION COST THE REPUBLICANS NOT ONLY THE WHITE HOUSE BUT LEFT THEM WITH THREAD-BARE MINORITIES IN BOTH HOUSES OF CONGRESS AND IN MOST STATE LEGISLATURES AS WELL.

FOR THREE DAYS THE GOVERNORS AND OTHER PARTY OFFICIALS EXAMINED THEIR TROUBLES WITH A DEGREE OF CANDOR SELDOM HEARD IN PUBLIC FORUMS. FOR TOO LONG, THEY AGREED, THE REPUBLICANS HAVE BEEN PERCEIVED BY TOO MANY VOTERS AS THE PARTY OF BIG BUSINESS, BECAUSE, AS FORMER TREASURY SECRETARY JOHN CONNALLY PUT IT, "WE'VE TALKED OF PROFITS, NOT JOBS." AS A RESULT, THE

PARTY'S POLLING EXPERT, ROBERT TEETER, SAID THE REPUBLICANS HAVE LOST TOUCH WITH LOWER-INCOME GROUPS AND HAVE BEEN ALMOST TOTALLY REJECTED BY BLACK AMERICANS. EQUALLY DISTURBING, SAID TEETER, ARE SURVEYS SHOWING THE PARTY'S LACK OF APPEAL TO YOUNG VOTERS, WHO WILL SOON MAKE UP THE MAJORITY OF THE ELECTORATE.

WITH THESE UNHAPPY FACTS AS A BACKDROP FOR THEIR DELIBERATIONS, THE REPUBLICANS EXAMINED THEIR OPTIONS. THERE WAS GENERAL AGREEMENT THAT THE CENTRAL ISSUE IS NOT SO MUCH WHO WILL ASSUME LEADERSHIP ROLES AS WHAT DIRECTION THE LEADERSHIP WILL TAKE. FOR YEARS THE PARTY'S RIGHT WING HAS EXERCISED INFLUENCE FAR BEYOND ITS NUMERICAL STRENGTH, BUT AS REPUBLICAN MODERATES ARE WELL AWARE ELECTIONS IN THIS COUNTRY ARE WON BY THOSE WHO BEST APPEAL, NOT TO THE EXTREME RIGHT OR LEFT, BUT TO THE POLITICAL CENTER.

DESPITE THEIR CURRENT DOLDRUMS, THE REPUBLICANS ARE NOT A LOST CAUSE. MODERN AMERICAN VOTERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE IN THE VAST MIDDLE CLASS, ARE MOTIVATED MORE BY SELF-INTEREST THAN PARTY AFFILIATION. AFTER ALL, RICHARD NIXON, BEFORE HIS WATERGATE TROUBLES, WON THE NINETEEN SEVENTY-TWO ELECTION BY A LANDSLIDE, AND THIS YEAR GERALD FORD LOST BY A NARROW MARGIN, DESPITE THE LINGERING SCARS OF THAT POLITICAL SCANDAL.

WATERGATE, THE REPUBLICANS BELIEVE, IS NOW BEHIND THEM, BUT NOT, THEY ADMIT, THEIR WIDELY-HELD IMAGE AS THE PARTY OF THE STATUS QUO. "LET'S BE FOR SOMETHING," ONE REPUBLICAN SAID THIS WEEK, AND NOT JUST AGAINST WHATEVER IT IS THE DEMOCRATS WANT. BUT UNTIL THE REPUBLICANS CAN BETTER COMMUNICATE WHAT THEY ARE FOR, AND CAN IDENTIFY THEIR PROGRAMS WITH MIDDLE CLASS

AMERICA, THE PARTY THAT CAME TO POWER UNDER ABRAHAM LINCOLN
FACES THE POSSIBILITY OF PERMANENT MINORITY STATUS -- OR, EVEN
WORSE, THE POSSIBILITY OF FADING AWAY LIKE THE FAST-VANISHING
BALD EAGLE.

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